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SUBJECT: HINDUS LAMENT "ISLAMIZATION" OF INDONESIA

REF: JAKARTA 01649

Classified By: POLITICAL OFFICER SANJAY RAMESH FOR REASONS 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Several prominent Hindu leaders of the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) told us the Hindu community faced increasing discrimination at the hands of a rapidly Islamizing Indonesian Muslim community and government. In a January 24 discussion, they claimed that the "Islamization of the country" had resulted in the 2006 government decree on building places of worship, which imposed what they consider to be difficult conditions for minority religious groups seeking to construct new places of worship. The PHDI leaders alleged that Hindus in Java seeking government services, including birth and marriage certificates, faced widespread discrimination. PHDI leaders said that the plight of Hindus received little attention as the Hindu community did not have the international support base and financial resources enjoyed by the Christians. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On January 24, Poloff made a courtesy call on several officials of the Parisada Hindu Dharma Indonesia (PHDI) including Chairman Agus Mantik, Director of International Communications A.S. Kobalen, Chairman of Daily Affairs Made Erata, and Chief Secretary Gusti Widana. (Strictly Protect) The PHDI describes itself as a privately funded, non-political, religious body which "represents the voice" of Indonesian Hindus and issues religious edicts that it claims are widely adhered to by the Hindu community. Chairman Agus said the Hindus in Indonesia number close to 10 million, of whom 3 million live in Bali. The rest are widely dispersed across the archipelago, with concentrations in East Java, South Sumatra, and Sulawesi. However, PHDI leaders claimed the Indonesian census deliberately under-counted the Hindu population to reinforce Indonesia's Muslim majority. (Note: according to 2004 data from the Ministry of Religion, Indonesian Hindus numbered 3.6 million).

¶3. (C) Agus said Indonesian Hindus faced "increasing discrimination" from a rapidly Islamizing Indonesian Muslim society, including from members of "so-called moderate groups Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama," as well as from the government. Agus told us that while the highest officials in the Indonesian government and moderate Muslim organizations talked the language of "tolerance," partly in order to placate foreign governments, this message was deliberately not being transmitted to the grassroots level.

¶4. (C) Agus and Kobalen alleged that an important manifestation of increasing Islamization was the 2006 decree on the construction of new places of worship, which took effect in March of that year. (Note: In 2006, the Ministries of Religion and Home Affairs issued a joint decree stipulating that building a new house of worship requires a

petition signed by 90 congregation members and at least 60 other community members. The petition must then be approved by the local offices of the Religious Affairs Department and the Communications Forum for Religious Harmony (reftel)). Agus and Kobalen refuted the government claim that the decree prevented inter-religious tension caused by the erection of unauthorized places of worship. They asserted that the decree's real effect was to make it extremely tough for non-Muslims to build new places of worship. They felt the decree particularly hurt Hindus in Java and Sumatra, a widely dispersed minority who found it "extremely difficult" to obtain the 90 congregation signatures needed. Agus and Kobalen noted that the requirement to get 60 community signatures posed an even more insurmountable obstacle; in effect, it meant getting 60 Muslim signatures. Kobalen said that even if the Hindus managed to negotiate this barrier, their efforts would be thwarted at the final "checkpoint," the need for approval from the local offices of the Religious Affairs and Communications Forum for Religious Harmony. Almost all the PHDI leaders believed the government issued this decree in response to demands by "Muslim groups."

¶ 15. (C) To substantiate their claims about the decree, Agus and Kobalen pointed to Cengkareng district in Java where the Hindus have been trying to build a temple since 2003. Kobalen said that after extensive lobbying efforts last year, the Hindus obtained the requisite 90 congregation signatures and 60 community signatures. However, to date, the local Religious Affairs office had not issued a permit to raise the temple. PHDI leaders did not foresee a resolution to the problem and appeared resigned that a temple could not be built in Cengkareng. (Note: PHDI leaders also claimed that Sikhs in Jakarta had been unable to obtain a permit for a new temple despite obtaining needed signatures. We will follow up with the Sikh community and other minorities on this issue.) They also said that radical Muslims from the Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) had demonstrated in front of the proposed temple to intimidate the Hindus.

¶ 16. (C) The PHDI leaders said another indicator of growing Islamization was increasing government and social discrimination being reported by Hindus, especially in eastern Java. The PHDI continued to receive accounts of Hindus unable to procure birth and marriage certificates, identity cards, and other basic local government services. Consequently, many Hindus simply identified themselves as Muslim on government identification cards to escape discrimination. Agus asserted that in recent years many Muslims in East Java, influenced by local Islamic preachers who characterized Hindus as "idol worshippers," had forced their Hindu neighbors to declare themselves Muslim. Kobalen claimed that even local Muslim preachers affiliated with Muhammadiyah and Nahdlatul Ulama preached intolerance against minorities. According to him, in some local districts such as Banten near Jakarta, strident Muslims had gone a step further and forced the rewriting of the local curriculum to de-emphasize Indonesia's "great Hindu past."

¶ 17. (C) PHDI leaders also claimed the plight of Hindus tended to be ignored by the government, media, and diplomats as the Hindus had no international support base. They argued that Christian missionaries, often based in the U.S., had used their enormous financial wherewithal to focus a spotlight on discrimination against Indonesian Christians. Indonesian Hindus had little recourse to such resources. Kobalen said he had traveled to India and forged links with nationalist Hindu parties, but these efforts had not yet translated into financial support. Therefore, PHDI was exploring tapping into the wealthy Hindu community in the United States.

¶ 18. (C) The PHDI leaders concluded that until now Balinese Hindus had escaped discrimination due to their majority status and the island's importance as a tourist destination. They did not think the Bali bombings were related to its Hindu character. However, they expressed foreboding that the drive towards Islamization in Indonesia would inevitably end up impacting Bali.

PASCOE